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FOR IMMEDIATE NEWS RELEASE

USDA PROMOTES GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM AND PUBLIC COMMENT

ST. PAUL, Minn., June 3, 2004 – Farm Service Agency State Executive Director John Monson and Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Bill Hunt reminded Minnesota farmers and ranchers that the interim final rule to implement the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill has been released. GRP helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands.

The release of the interim rule, with request for public comment, allows USDA to conduct a program sign-up and implementation through September 30, 2004. According to the interim rule, USDA will consider all comments received during a 60-day public comment period in developing a final GRP rule.

The interim final rule will be published in the Federal Register, and the public will have until July 20, 2004, to comment on the rule. The interim rule states that GRP rental agreements and easements are designed for working agricultural lands and describes multiple enrollment duration options.

Applications will be rated based on ranking and selection criteria developed in Minnesota following broad national guidelines. USDA proposes that land eligibility criteria will focus on preserving Minnesota's most critical grassland resources, native and natural grasslands and shrubland. After the Minnesota ranking process is developed a 2004 GRP signup will be announced and applications will be taken at USDA Service Centers.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Forest Service are coordinating implementation of GRP.

For more information on GRP and other conservation programs, contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or online at <http://offices.usda.gov>. Additional GRP information is available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/grp>

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